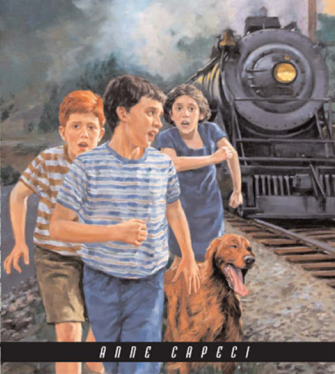




Ghost Train



ANNE CAPELLI

For my nieces and my nephew:

Delphine Isabella
Sophie Nicky
Nicolas Catherine

—A. C.



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Ghost Train

A N D E C A P E C I



PEACHTREE
ATLANTA

Map of Scenic, Washington
Work camp for the new West Portal
of Great Northern Railway's 8-mile tunnel

Avalanche Basin

Bear Rock

Cave

Lookout Point

Schoolhouse

School Shed

Family Cabins

← Road to Skykomish

Cascade Mountains



Surprise Lake

Crystal Lake

Indian Trail

Tye River

Old Tunnel Entrance
Railroad Track Switchbacks

New Tunnel Entrance

Dynamite
Storage
Shed.

Lodge

Cookhouse

Hospital

Recreation Hall

Garage

Workers' Quarters

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CHAPTER ONE

SNEAK ATTACK

Scenic, Washington
1926

Look out below!” shouted Billy Cole.

He grabbed the rope that hung from a tree at the edge of the Tye River. A deep pool had formed there, in a bend in the river.

Billy and the other children who lived in Scenic had spent the whole day in the deliciously cold water. Even now, with supper eaten and the sun low in the sky, a handful of boys and girls had returned in their damp woolen bathing suits for one last dunk.

And maybe for a prank, too, Billy thought.

Holding on tight to the rope, he leaped from the riverbank. A thrill shot through him as he swung out over the water. The final golden rays of sun shone on

the Cascade Mountains overhead and the air smelled richly of pine. In a dizzy flash, Billy saw the wood-frame buildings of the work camp through the trees.

Billy and his family had lived in Scenic ever since work on the new railroad tunnel had begun. The tunnel itself was out of sight, on the far side of camp. But Billy could hear the faint sounds of dynamite blasting, and of pumps and drills and work engines.

As he reached the peak of his swing, a girl's voice made Billy look down. *Perfect*, he thought. Alice Ann Lockhart, the biggest know-it-all in Scenic, was swimming just below him.

"I've already learned my lines for the Fourth of July pageant," Billy heard Alice Ann jabber to her friends Lucy and Janet. "Betsy Ross is one of the most important roles, you know."

She paddled carefully, keeping her chin-length blond hair out of the water. In her brand-new, blue-and-white-striped bathing costume, she looked as perfect as a china doll.

Not for long, Billy thought.

He let go of the rope and dropped into the river. Then he kicked wildly with his arms and legs, splashing water all around.

"Stop it!" Alice Ann sputtered. But it was too late.

Her hair was soaking wet and plastered to her cheeks. Billy had to choke back a laugh.

“Gee, did I do that?” he asked in his most innocent voice.

“You know you did!” Alice Ann shot back. She climbed out of the water and sat on the riverbank in a huff. Water dripped from her suit onto the layer of pine needles on the ground. “You’re just jealous ’cause I’m in the pageant and you’re not!”

“Well, you got me there, Alice Ann,” Billy said. He kicked lazily across the swimming hole. “Here Finn and Dannie and me are stuck having fun and doing any old thing we want all day long. It’s just terrible!”

Laughter rang out from above the swimming hole. Billy’s best pals, Finn Mackenzie and Dannie Renwick, stood on the bank. Red-haired Finn was just reaching for the rope Billy had abandoned. His eyes sparkled with fun.

“That’s right,” Finn said. “I’d much rather be cooped up in the schoolhouse learning lines and pretending to be folks who’ve been dead for over a hundred years.”

“Besides, anyone can be in the pageant who wants to,” Dannie added. She tugged at the ill-fitting bathing suit that had been handed down to her by her brother.

GHOST TRAIN

Her dog, Buster, was next to her. “Your mother’s already been to the cabin three times to ask me, Alice Ann. I just don’t want to, that’s all.”

Lucy and Janet were still swimming near Billy. He saw the disapproving way they stared at Dannie.

“Well,” said Janet, “if you don’t want to celebrate the one hundred and fiftieth birthday of our country, I guess that’s your business.”

“Oh, I’ll celebrate,” Dannie said. “In my own way.”

With that, she took a running jump and splashed into the river. Finn dropped from the swinging rope a moment later. Buster barked while the two of them splashed and dunked with Billy. Their wild play sent Lucy and Janet diving away. Glaring, the girls climbed out of the water to join Alice Ann.

That left just Philip Mackey in the river with Billy, Dannie, and Finn. Philip leaned against a rock at the edge of the swimming hole, in shallow water up to his waist.

“Father made me join the pageant,” Philip said. His straight hair had fallen over his eyes. Brushing it back, he glanced up at Alice Ann. His face turned bright red, and he looked quickly away again. “But I guess it’s not so bad,” he mumbled.

Billy had to roll his eyes. He got along fine with

Philip most times. But for some reason, the railroad owner's son was always trying to impress Alice Ann. For the life of him, Billy couldn't understand why.

"I'll tell you one thing. The Fourth of July pageant is a whole lot more fun than some dumb pretend war," Alice Ann said. She looked over at Billy, Finn, and Dannie. "Especially when *your* side doesn't stand a chance."

She, Lucy, and Janet all started giggling. Billy felt his cheeks burn.

"You take that back!" he said. But he knew he didn't sound convincing. He and Dannie and Finn had been beaten by the other "army" in every battle so far.

The "war" had begun just two weeks earlier, on the day classes in Scenic's two-room schoolhouse had ended for the summer. Wes and Eddie Gundy, along with Eddie's friend Jim Walsh, had attacked them with pinecones as they left the school yard. Since then, the two "armies" had been going after each other with pinecones, pails of water, and any other "ammunition" they could find.

"It's not our fault Eddie and Jim are bigger than us," Finn grumbled. "They're two grades ahead at school."

"And Wes tries to act bigger, even though he's ten, like us," Dannie added.

Billy quickly peered into the trees on either side of the river. How could he have forgotten to be on the alert for an attack?

Reluctantly he dragged out of the water. Darkness was beginning to settle over the woods. Trees and rocks and scurrying squirrels were melting into a tangle of shadows. Suddenly Billy thought he saw something move.

“That’s Wes’s red cap!” he whispered.

“Where?” Alice Ann said loudly.

“*Shh!*” Dannie told her.

Billy squinted hard at the spot in the trees. Sure enough, Wes was peeking out from behind a Douglas fir tree. Billy didn’t see Eddie or Jim. But he had a feeling they were nearby.

“It’s them, all right,” he whispered.

Quickly he bent to pick up some pinecones. Finn and Dannie clambered out of the water and did the same. As Billy reached for more cones, Buster hustled in front of him. The retriever crouched over his front paws. He sniffed at some wasps that circled the low branches of a fir tree.

“Wasps, eh?” Billy murmured.

He tilted his head back and stared up higher into the tree. There, about a dozen feet up, hung a wasps’ nest.

The paper-like ball was pale against the dark, bushy branches. It was as big as a melon, Billy guessed. Maybe even bigger.

Then an idea popped into Billy's head. "We might beat the Gundys and Jim Walsh yet," he whispered.

Dannie saw the nest, too. "Sure," she said. "All we've got to do is knock it out of the tree at exactly the right moment."

"Knock *what* out of the tree?" Alice Ann asked.

Billy opened his mouth to tell her to clear out of the way. But he never got the words out. At that moment, Wes, Eddie, and Jim burst from the trees. They were shouting like banshees and throwing something Billy couldn't see clearly.

Sticks and pinecones rained down on Billy's head and shoulders. Lucy, Janet, and Alice Ann jumped up, their shrieks filling the air. Buster seemed to be everywhere at once, barking.

Somehow Billy got his hand around a rock. He heaved it up at the wasps' nest. He heard a thud and saw the nest hit the ground.

Right next to Alice Ann, Lucy, and Janet.